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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 SHANGHAI 000471

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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [FAIR](#) [CASC](#) [PREL](#) [CH](#)
SUBJECT: PRELIMINARY FIELD INVESTIGATION OF SHANGHAI MD-11 CRASH
CONCLUDES

REF: A. Ng-EEB/TRA Email of 11/28/09: Avient Air ACCID: Sitrep One
[1](#)B. Ng-EEB/TRA Email of 12/01/09: Avient Air ACCID: Sitrep Two

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This message is sensitive but unclassified, not for distribution
outside USG channels.

[1](#)1. (SBU) The Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC) has
indicated its desire to complete within six months its
investigation into the November 28 crash of a
Zimbabwean-registered MD-11 cargo charter aircraft at Shanghai
Pudong International Airport, according to National
Transportation Safety Bureau (NTSB) officials. The NTSB noted
that such a deadline would be ambitious and challenging for any
civil aviation authority to meet. The lone surviving American
crewmember was transferred to a medical facility in Hong Kong on
December 3 for further treatment. End Summary.

Background

[1](#)2. (U) On the morning of November 28, a Zimbabwean-registered
MD-11 cargo freight plane crashed upon takeoff at Pudong
International Airport (PVG). The seven-member crew included four
U.S. citizens. Three of the Americans were fatally injured, and
the fourth received serious injuries but has since stabilized.
Carrying a load of electronic equipment destined for Bishkek,
Kyrgyzstan, the MD-11 aircraft was attempting to take off from
the longest of PVG's three runways. The aircraft did not lift
off and crashed beyond the runway, erupting in flames. The PVG
Airport Authority told Embassy Beijing FAA Attache that the
runway involved in the crash would likely remain closed for
"about a month," although NTSB officials personally observed a
plane landing on said runway the morning of December 7.

NTSB: No MD-11 Airworthiness Issues of Immediate Concern

[1](#)3. (SBU) According to NTSB officials, preliminary analysis of
the crash indicated no immediate airworthiness concerns for the
MD-11 aircraft; therefore, industry rumors signaling a CAAC
"no-fly" order for MD-11 aircraft in China is imminent are
baseless. Current lines of inquiry are focusing on operator
issues (both for the aircraft operator Avient Aviation as well
as for the flight crew). The NTSB officials noted that the
aircraft had recently undergone significant refurbishment and
only returned to service November 20.

Surviving AmCit Receiving Treatment in Hong Kong

¶4. (SBU) Having been transferred to Hong Kong December 2 for medical treatment, the lone surviving American crewmember, Mr. William Johnson remains in stable condition. (Note: Mr. Johnson has not signed a Privacy Act Waiver; please do not release information related to his condition outside USG channels. End Note) Family members are in frequent contact with Hong Kong American Citizen Services (ACS) officers. Doctors estimate he will need to remain hospitalized for at least an additional six weeks. Mr. Johnson's family is still considering a medical evacuation to the United States. However, doctors have cautioned that such a long trip might not be advisable given his current condition.

¶5. (SBU) The CAAC still considers Mr. Johnson a part of its formal inquiry into the accident. When Mr. Johnson's family initially sought to have him moved to Hong Kong, the CAAC refused to permit his departure. Upon the intervention of Embassy Beijing FAA Attache, the CAAC consented to the transfer of Mr. Johnson to a medical facility in Hong Kong but requested notification in the event that Mr. Johnson departs Hong Kong. The extent of Mr. Johnson's injuries currently precludes his participation in an accident interview. (Note: He suffered severe smoke inhalation and remains on a respirator. End Note) The NTSB team offered to facilitate an interview with Mr. Johnson on behalf of the CAAC should he return to the U.S. prior to being interviewed.

¶6. (SBU) The CAAC ordered autopsies on the three deceased American crewmembers December 5. Initially, the CAAC had indicated an autopsy would not be necessary, but ultimately changed its mind. (Note: NTSB officials noted that deceased flight crew autopsies are standard practice for aircraft

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accident investigations in the U.S. End Note)

Comment

¶7. (SBU) FAA Attache and NTSB officials have characterized the CAAC's handling of the MD-11 crash investigation as very professional and highly cooperative. One team member commented to EconOff that in 1999 he participated in a CAAC-led air crash investigation, and that in the intervening decade the CAAC had made substantial improvements. Post will continue to monitor the situation. End Comment.

¶8. (U) This report was coordinated with the NTSB team.
CAMP